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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: FEBRUARY 27, 2009

Summary: National political stories, in the wake of the Supreme Court's judgment to bar Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif from holding any public office, continued to dominate headlines on the second consecutive day in all newspapers on Friday. Several major newspapers highlighted remarks attributed to President Zardari that "PPP knows how to tackle political challenges." PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif's claim made while addressing a public gathering that "Shahbaz is still Chief Minister (of Punjab)" also received prominent coverage. Newspapers highlighted Admiral Mullen's remarks that "General Kayani's visit had helped U.S. understand the Swat peace agreement." CIA Director Panetta's statement that the "drone attacks inside Pakistan would go on" received front page coverage in newspapers.

The current political upheaval following the announcement of the Supreme Court's judgment, and consequently the departure of the Punjab administration continued to grab attention of the editorial writers and columnists today. The Islamabad-based daily, "Pakistan Observer," noted that the "ensuing turbulent period would inflict colossal damage on the already shattered economy and the life of the common man would become more miserable." The second-largest daily, "Nawa-i-Waqt," advised that the "situation may perhaps be salvaged if President Zardari acts unilaterally to nullify the Supreme Court's verdict." Likewise the mass circulation daily, "Jang," cautioned that "in the past, whenever there was power politics and confrontation in the country, only non-political forces and adventures took advantage of the situation." End Summary.

News Stories

"PPP Knows How To Tackle Challenges: Asif" "The Nation" (02/27)

"President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday said that Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was a force that knew how to contend with political challenges adding however, it did not believe in confrontation and had therefore adopted the policy of reconciliation for the sake of democracy and political stability in the country."

"Shahbaz Is Still Chief Minister, Says Nawaz" "Dawn" (02/27)

"Pakistan Muslim League-N Chief Nawaz Sharif has again rejected Supreme Court's decision disqualify him and his brother Shahbaz Sharif and said Shahbaz Sharif continues to be the constitutional Chief Minister. 'I've asked him (Shahbaz Sharif) to go to the Punjab Assembly and start his official work,' the PML-N leader told a large gathering of party workers in Sheikhpura on Thursday."

"Governor Rule After PML-N Declared 'War', Says Zardari" "Daily Times" (02/27)

"President Asif Ali Zardari said on Thursday he had imposed governor's rule in Punjab after the Sharif brothers declared war on the Presidency following the Supreme Court decision to disqualify them. Addressing a meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the president said he had been left with no other constitutional alternative."

"Verdict Has Harmed Democracy: Gilani - PPP Feels The Heat As Turmoil Over SC Ruling Mounts" "Dawn" (02/27)

"The PPP-led coalition government seemed facing the worst political crisis on its 11-month life as nation-wide protests on Thursday denounced a Supreme Court ruling that Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani acknowledged had hurt a nascent democracy."

"Nawaz Gives Roadmap For Resistance" "The Nation" (02/27)

"Shutting all doors of reconciliation with PPP and deciding never to hold talks with President Asif Zardari, PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif has announced the 'roadmap' for the resistance movement across the country against ineligibility decision and imposition of the Governor Rule in Punjab. This was decided during an important meeting held at his Raiwind residence on Thursday."

"PML-N Decides To Launch Movement Against Govt." "Daily Times" (02/27)

"The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) decided on Thursday to launch a nationwide protest against the PPP government, a private TV channel reported. The decision was taken during a meeting presided over by PML-N Chief Nawaz Sharif. The meeting also decided to submit a requisition for an NA session, the channel added."

"PML-N Protest Cripples Life In Cities" "The News" (02/27)

"Charged protesters burnt vehicles and tyres as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) observed countrywide protests on Thursday by holding demonstrations and staging rallies against the disqualification of the Sharif brothers and the imposition of governor's rule in Punjab. Most shopping centers in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura and other parts of the province remained closed. Lawyers and traders also joined the demonstrations."

"Rangers Deployed In Punjab Cities" "The Nation" (02/27)

"The government has called Rangers contingent in different cities of the province to assist law enforcement agencies in maintaining peace and tranquility in the Punjab."

"Crackdown On Media Proposed Sherry Threatens Resignation" "The News" (02/27)

"President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani are being strongly urged by some members of the Federal Cabinet to launch an immediate crackdown on the print media and some TV channels, but Information Minister Sherry Rehman is believed to have indicated to resign if this was done."

"Kayani's Visit To Help Understand Swat Deal: Mullen" "Daily Times" (02/27)

"United States Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen termed the visit of Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Gen. Ashfaq Kayani to the U.S. extremely positive, saying the visit had helped U.S. understand the Swat peace agreement, a private TV channel reported. According to the channel, Mullen told a press briefing in Virginia that the U.S. would have to extend more assistance to Pakistan in the war against terrorism."

"Kayani Meets U.S. Leaders" "The News" (02/27)

"Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani who is on an official visit to the United States had extensive meetings and

consultations in Washington on Thursday. According to ISPR, he called on General (R) James L. Jones, National Security Advisor, and Richard Holbrooke, Special Representative to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and discussed the wide range of security situation in the region."

"Drone Attacks Inside Pakistan To Go On: CIA Chief" "The News" (02/27)

"CIA Director Leon Panetta said on Wednesday that U.S. aerial attacks against Al Qaeda and other extremist strongholds inside Pakistan would continue, despite concerns about a popular Pakistani backlash, Washington Post reported."

"FO Hopeful Of Change In U.S. Policy On Drone Attacks" "Dawn" (02/27)

"Pakistan said on Thursday it was still hopeful of a change in the U.S. policy on drone attacks in tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, despite a statement by the CIA Chief that the raids would continue. 'The review (of U.S. policy) is not yet completed and we hope that as a result of the review there would be some positive change,' Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit said at a weekly media briefing."

"Trilateral meetings To Continue" "Dawn" (02/27)

"U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Thursday that the U.S., Pakistan and Afghanistan had agreed to continue their trilateral talks and the next meeting would be held in later April or early May."

"Pakistan Under Pressure At U.S. Talks" "Dawn" (02/27)
"The U.S.-Pakistan-Afghanistan talks are not over yet but Pakistan already seems to have lost much ground. Since this weekend, when Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi arrived in Washington for talks with his U.S. and Afghan counterparts, Pakistan has been singled out as the most dangerous country in the world."

"U.S. Senator Under Fire Over Drone Facility In Pakistan Remarks" "Daily Times" (02/27)

"Republican members of the House Intelligence Committee have asked the Obama administration to conduct an inquiry into comments by Senator Dianne Feinstein that appeared to confirm the existence of a secret U.S. facility inside Pakistan used to carry out drone attacks in the Tribal Areas. Amid growing concern inside Pakistan over the strikes, Newsweek reported that the unusual request by the Republicans sought a 'damage assessment' into the remarks by Feinstein, the new chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee."

"U.S. Will Boost Supplies For Afghan Force, Says General" "Dawn" (02/27)

"The United States will be able to ramp up supplies for thousands of extra troops being sent to Afghanistan even though convoys have come under attack in Pakistan, Air Force General Duncan McNabb, Head of U.S. Transportation Command said on Wednesday."

"Pakistan Seeks More Trade With U.S. To Overcome Economic Issues" "Daily Times" (02/27)

"Pakistan is keen to expand trade with the United States to overcome its economic problems, Ambassador Abdullah Haroon said on Tuesday, hoping the Obama administration would consider giving more market access to Pakistani goods."

"U.S., Britain Warn Citizens Against Travel To Pakistan" "Daily Times" (02/27)

"The U.S. and Britain have advised their citizens against travelling to Pakistan, citing security concerns, a private TV channel reported on Thursday. The U.S. State Department released a statement saying US citizens should not travel to Pakistan as the Taliban might target them."

"Solecki's Kidnappers - FC Suspicion Falls On Baramdag" "Dawn"

(02/27)

"Frontier Corps Inspector-General Maj. Gen. Saleem Nawaz has said that a number of officials, including some Americans, are engaged in 'back-door' negotiations with the kidnappers of John Solecki, Chief of the UNHCR's local office, he told reporter on Thursday. He said he could not rule out involvement of nationalist leader Nawabzada Baramdagh Bugti in the kidnapping."

"Sufi Offers Role For Peace In Waziristan, Bajaur" "The News" (02/27)

"Security forces have vacated all the checkpoints in the Swat valley as part of the ongoing efforts to restore peace and stopped checking vehicles forthwith, sources said on Thursday. Meanwhile, Sufi Muhammad said he was ready to play his role for restoration of peace in Waziristan and Bajaur."

"FBI Team Due On March 4 To Investigate Mumbai Attacks" "The Nation" (02/27)

"A delegation of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) led by its Director Robert Mueller, will visit Pakistan on March 4 to help Islamabad in probe into the Mumbai attacks, said the Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit on Thursday."

"54 Mega Projects: Friends Of Pakistan Help Sought" "Business Recorder" (02/27)

"Pakistan has sought assistance from Friends of Pakistan (FoP) for 54 mega development projects, including 8.4 billion-dollar Diamer Bhasha dam, and Neelum Jhelum hydropower project. According to the sources in Islamabad on Thursday, a formal announcement for assistance may come in the next ministerial meeting of the FoP that the Japanese government has offered to host."

Editorials/Op-eds

"Just After One Year And Seven Days!," an editorial in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (02/27)

"It is regrettable that even after one year of assumption of powers, the government has still not settled down and each day a new front is opened.... What a shame for those who claim to believe in democracy and democratic norms! In addition to severe setback to the system, it is also worrisome that the ensuing turbulent period would inflict colossal damage on the already shattered economy and the life of the common man would become more miserable."

"Beginning Of A New And Horrific Era Of Confrontation," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (02/27)

"The situation may perhaps be salvaged if President Asif Ali Zardari acts unilaterally to nullify the Supreme Court verdict against the Sharif brothers through an act of Parliament, agrees to give lawyers freehand for the long march and gives assurance for sticking to the Charter of Democracy.... We also pray to Mian Nawaz Sharif to mind his language; specially, he should desist from asking government and police employees to stop taking orders from the government."

"Don't Go To The extreme," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (02/27)

"In the past, whenever there was power politics and confrontation in the country, only non-political forces and adventurers took advantage of the situation. Therefore, any political exploit at this moment will be damaging for the present democratic setup. The options of filing review petition against the Supreme Court's verdict, and the selection of the new leader of the house in the Punjab Assembly are still on hand. Hence the politicians must act sensibly, and refrain from going to the point of no return."

"Governor's Rule," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (02/27)

"The PPP has opted for a dangerous path of confrontation.... There are several immediate worries. The PML-N may take to the streets in Punjab and threaten a severe law and order crisis. The lawyer's long march may now culminate in violent confrontation. The federation may feel the strains of pitting the largest province against the center. And on the back-burner may go the country's serious crises of militancy, the economy and governance. Democracy is not dead in Pakistan, but common sense may be."

"Whither Politics?," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (02/27)

"The imposition of Governor's rule stands challenged in the eyes of law. By various accounts it seems that the requisition for Assembly's session was sent before Governor's rule was clamped on Punjab. Whatever the actual constitutional position may be, one thing is very clear: the country is not prepared to face the political crisis that will result in more hardships for the common man."

"On Way To Armageddon," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/27)

"President Zardari needs to seriously weigh the consequences. He alone is in a position to call the ugly standoff to a halt. For this there is need on his part to employ whatever legal, constitutional and administrative means are available to him to undo the disqualification of the Sharifs and maintain the PPP-PML(N) alliance in Punjab."

"Supreme Court Verdict And After," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (02/27)

"Mian Nawaz Sharif is breathing fire as he has been pushed into a corner. The kind of situation Pakistan is going through -- including economic trouble and terrorism - is not hidden from anyone. In this scenario we urge President Zardari and PM Gillani to take immediate and necessary steps to control the situation. They must activate the Parliament to dispel the aftereffects of the Supreme Court verdict, hold talks to resolve the judiciary issue and end Governor's Rule in Punjab at the earliest."

"Tick-Tock ... Tick-Tock...," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/27)

"An innocent bystander may be forgiven for thinking that Pakistan was being run by the President and the small coterie around him, with democratic process bound and gagged in a cupboard in the bowels of the National Assembly.... As the MPA's protest, desultory rioting dots the country and the Sharifs contemplate their next move, the world watches. Thus far comment from outside has been limited to 'this is an internal matter for Pakistan' with both the U.S. and U.K. administrations saying words to that effect; but neither can view these developments with equanimity."

"Reading Tea-Leaves Of PMLN's Ouster," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (02/27)

"This time around, the PMLN and the PPP have chosen to square off during a most dangerous regional and global moment. The economy is demanding solutions that the population of Pakistan is not happy with. Islamabad needs flexibility of response and pragmatism as never before, but the politicians are refusing to give each other any ground. The two parties are going for the kill. As in the past, they might both come a cropper. This time, however, there is real danger that the state they are trampling upon in the process may join the failed ranks of Somalia, Sudan, Congo and Zimbabwe."

"Sharif Brothers Disqualification: Killing For Federation," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (02/27)

"Peace in Swat and FATA was established with great difficulty. It cannot be said how long this will remain so, as this peace is not acceptable to the U.S., NATO, India and Israel. And now the political leadership has created a law and order situation in

Punjab. Pakistan's enemies will take advantage of this turmoil. Hence nationalism demands that both PPP and PML-N deal with the present situation dispassionately and try to revive a spirit of tolerance for each other."

"Don't Cross The Line," an editorial in liberal and independent Hyderabad based Sindhi Daily "Kawish" (Cir: 105,000) (02/27)

"After the disqualification of Sharif brothers, protest demonstrations continue in the central Punjab, whereas the PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif has asked the civil administration to disregard the orders of the provincial Governor. One has to think, and ask how much this call is in the interest of the country, and what benefits this civil disobedience will give to the country. When unelected elements ruled the country for about 11 years, no such calls were given, but now when the nation gives its mandate to the politicians, why they do not tolerate each other even just for a year. We advise our politicians not to violate the democratic values and traditions."

"Imposition Of Governor Rule, And Protest In Punjab," an editorial in the Karachi-based right-wing pro-Jamaat-e-Islami Urdu daily "Jasarat" (cir. 3,000) (02/27)

"Pakistani nation has rejected the Supreme Court's judgment to declare the Sharif brothers as ineligible, and the imposition of Governor Rule in the province. This has further complicated the political scenario in the country. And perhaps, this is the biggest ever protest against any court decision in the Pakistan history. Nawaz Sharif's consent to join the lawyers' movement has annoyed President Zardari. Present state of affairs is undermining the country, and our enemies don't need anything else to do."

"Governor Rule Should Not Have Imposed," an editorial in Karachi based left-wing Sindhi Daily "Awami Awaz" (Cir. 70,000) (02/27)

"Political forces in the country are in shock to see the imposition of Governor Rule in the Punjab province. The atmosphere of reconciliation and compromise that one saw in the country following February 18 elections is almost over between the two mainstream parties. And it seems that Pakistan is going back to the politics of enmity and vengeance of 1990s."

"So What Else Did Anyone Expect?," an op-ed by Ayaz Amir in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (02/27)

"With the Sharifs' disqualification by a bench of the Supreme Court - headed by a Chief Justice whose close links to Zardari are well known - followed by the ouster of the PML-N government in Punjab and the imposition of governor's rule, Zardari has let slip the mask from his face by revealing his naked ambition: this time to extend his power and wrest control of Pakistan's largest province. This is a dangerous gambit with unpredictable consequences because it remains to be seen whether he is able to master the crisis he has sparked or whether it becomes too big for him.... Now we confront unchecked folly made complicated by gnawing insecurity. What price will the nation have to pay for this?"

"America Should Return Home," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 125,000) (02/27)

"President Barack Obama says that the U.S. administration will not tolerate safe havens of terrorists.... People in the tribal areas have picked up arms in retaliation to American and Pakistani security forces' operations; these people are not terrorists.... President Obama has talked of a new strategy but in our view this new strategy should be of striking peace deals on the pattern of Swat peace agreement. America should leave Afghanistan honorably."

"Mounting U.S. And Indian Pressure," an editorial in liberal Urdu daily "Express" (cir. 100,000) (02/27)

"U.S. President Obama has said that terrorist havens in Pakistan will not be tolerated... The inclusion of some more names and allegations in the extensive charge-sheet by the Indian government against Ajmal Kasab shows that the India wants to mount pressure on Pakistan. In this scenario, it is the government's responsibility

to make the domestic situation peaceful at the earliest so that national issues are handled appropriately and pressure by India and the U.S. also countered."

"Pakistan Would Be With U.S., Provided That...?," editorial in the Karachi-based center-right sensationalist Urdu daily "Ummat" (cir. 33,000) (02/27)

"In his first address to the U.S. Congress, President Obama has pledged that his government would not allow safe havens to terrorist anywhere in the world including Pakistan. If U.S. President really thinks Pakistan so important, then he needs to consult with Pakistani political and religious parties before devising any new policy about this region. If he sincerely works for global peace and prosperity, he will not find Pakistanis far behind, and it is for sure that the Muslim world will also support him."

"A Poor Approach," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (02/27)

"The civilian casualties these drone attacks cause spread the feeling of hatred of the U.S. and make it easier for Al Qaeda and Taliban operatives to persuade the vengeful tribesmen to join their band of insurgents.... A more suitable course for the U.S., which fits in with its assessment that the Pakistan government is now committed to root out militancy, would be to work through sharing intelligence with it and let it devise a strategy to get rid of the hideouts without creating a serious backlash from the local population."
GFeierstein